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LEGENDS OF THE JEWS

Die Sagen der Juden. Gesammelt und bearbeitet von MICHA
JOSEF BIN GORION. I. Von der Urzeit. Frankfurt a. M. :
RÜTTEN UND LOENING, 1913. pp. xvi + 378.

The loving devotion of Jewish people to the Bible has resulted in developments of its narratives which constitute, as it were, a new biblical world enriched and embellished, and at times distorted by the folk fancy. The heroes and events of the Bible appear in this legendary world as in a kaleidoscopic mirror. Some of these developments are of considerable cultural interest in their influence upon Christian and Mohammedan legend. But they have an interest of their own as forming, in many respects, the chief outcome of the Jewish popular imagination for nearly a thousand years after the close of the biblical canon. They form a large portion of that section of Midrashic literature known as the Haggadah.

Of recent years considerable attention has been paid to this subject. B. Beer devoted a whole book to a life of Abraham, derived from these sources. Hamburger began his encyclopedia by an alphabetical treatment of Jewish legends, which did not go very far into the alphabet; he carried the treatment throughout the first, or Biblical, volume of his encyclopedia. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* also gave considerable attention to the legends relating to the chief biblical characters. Quite recently two extensive works have been devoted to a systematic account of the Legends of the Jews about biblical characters, one by Dr. Louis Ginzberg, the text of which is now complete in four volumes which are to be completed by a fifth containing references

to the sources and other learned epilogemona ; and there has now appeared the first volume of a similar work in German which promises to be equally, if not more, extensive.

The first volume, just published, deals with the legendary material of the Jews relating to the Bible narrative from the Creation down to Noah. It is divided into four books: the first dealing with the Creation; the second with Adam and his descendants; the third with the Flood; and the fourth with the upper and nether worlds. Adam is dealt with both in the second and fourth books: in the former as an individual, in the latter as a type. Each legend has its separate section and separate head, which makes reference very easy; and the plan and arrangement of the book is admirably adapted for its purpose, to make the biblical legends easily accessible. The sources from which the pseudonymous author has drawn are almost exclusively Hebrew or Aramaic. A few legends relating to the demons are taken from Judæo-Arabic sources and are given in the last section of the book. Samaritan and Karaitic versions of legends are occasionally given. On the other hand, the large material given in the Hellenistic sources is entirely ignored, and no attempt is made to utilize the Christian pseudepigraphic literature and the Church Fathers. The legends are seemingly given in tolerably full translation or paraphrase, and the sources of each section are given at the end of the book, with occasional parallels, though no attempt is made to give these in completeness or to discuss their divergencies. Judging from the long list of Midrashim and other works quoted, the book is the result of very wide reading and research.

It is natural to compare it with the treatment of the same subject and period contained in Dr. Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*. At first sight it seems to be much more extensive, devoting 348 pages to that section of biblical legends which Dr. Ginzberg covers in 181. But the German page contains many fewer words than the English one, and a rough estimate would seem to show that the German author devotes about 80,000 words to his subject as against 55,000 of Dr. Ginzberg.

Even this comparison is misleading, since the methods of presentation of the two authors differ considerably in conciseness. The German writer translates or paraphrases his sources in full; Dr. Ginzberg summarizes and abstracts. Thus in half a page (65-6) the latter gives all the points about the legend of Lilith, to which 'Gorion' devotes a page and a quarter (323-4). It seems probable, therefore, that Dr. Ginzberg's treatment contains even more material than the German writer's, especially as he draws from the Greek apocryphal literature and the Church Fathers. In the absence of Dr. Ginzberg's volume of Notes it is, at present, impossible to compare the respective writers' use of their sources.

Turning from matter to form (which is acknowledged to be due to the compiler's wife, Mrs. Rahel Berdyczewski), the style in which the legends are told is clear, simple, and flowing. There is an appropriate imitation of Luther's German, which itself follows the vivid austerity of the Hebrew original. The different variants of the respective legends are introduced by formulae like 'others say', 'again we read', 'it is said', and the like, which bring out the difference of sources in an unpedantic way. A number of beast-fables are introduced in the account of the Creation and of Noah's Ark which do not seem to be included in Dr. Ginzberg's book; and anything likely to offend childish readers is omitted or glossed over. From this point of view the book seems to be more suitable for children's reading than its English compeer.

The play of the Jewish folk fancy, as shown in this collection, is remarkable for two qualities—its daring and its tenderness. The cosmological flights of the Jewish imagination, as shown in the elaborate embroideries of the Creation and of Flood legends, are fully as daring as in Greek mythology, though occasionally the question arises whether there has not been some 'contamination' from this source. But what strikes one even more noticeably is the tenderness with which human relations are treated in Jewish legends. Adam gives up seventy years of his thousand to his most distinguished descendant

David, who was otherwise destined for an early grave. Eve was made out of Adam's rib because a man's wife is flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone. And so throughout, wherever the Jewish fancy can introduce a touch of human feeling, it embellishes the biblical legends with deep-felt, yet manly, tenderness. The ethical genius of the Jewish people was not exhausted by the prophets; it is equally mirrored in these humbler legends of the Jewish folk.

ARTHURIAN LEGENDS IN JUDAEO-GERMAN

Hebrew-German Romances and Tales and their Relation to the Romantic Literature of the Middle Ages. Part I. Arthurian Legends. By Dr. LEO LANDAU, M.A. *Teutonia*, Heft 21. Leipzig: AVENARIUS, 1912. pp. lxxv + 150.

It has long been known that many of the most popular romances of the Middle Ages existed in Judaeo-German versions. Steinschneider in the *Serapaeum* gave a list of them almost at the beginning of his career as bibliographer, and treated the subject occasionally in his *Hebräische Bibliographie* and systematically in his *Volksliteratur*. The romances spread throughout Europe and formed a link between all the nations from Iceland to Spain; from Russia to Ireland. It is a mistake to think that the Jews were in any way isolated from the general course of European culture during the Middle Ages. In some directions, indeed, they formed a link between Orient and Occident, notably in the case of the so-called fables of Bidpai, better known in Jewish literature by the title of *Kalila wa-Dimna*. It is not, therefore, surprising to find that the German Jews of the later Middle Ages translated or adapted many of the most popular romances, such as the Dietrich saga, Flore and Blanchefleur, Emperor Octavian, Preciosa, Paris and Vienne, and Sir Bevis of Hampton, the last known as the 'Bovobuch'. But the form in which these were written or printed was late, and these romances had not hitherto attracted the attention of philologists like the French